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Letter dated 20 October 2017 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to inform you that on 31 October at 10 a.m., the Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations, under the French presidency of the Security Council, will hold an open debate on "Children and armed conflict", pursuant to your report on that topic.

The Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Mr. Jean-Yves Le Drian, will preside at the debate, which is in continuity with the principles and commitments adopted at the Paris international conference in February 2007 and the conference held on 21 February 2017, with the aim of preventing the recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts.

The debate will provide an opportunity for members of the United Nations who have not yet done so to endorse those principles and commitments. It will also allow discussion on the best ways to prevent the recruitment and use of children by non-State armed groups, including groups committing terrorist acts.

The note concerning this event is annexed to this letter.

I would be grateful if you would circulate this letter and its annex as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Anne **Gueguen**
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Chargé d'affaires a.i.

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Annex to the letter dated 20 October 2017 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: English]

Concept note for the Security Council open debate on children and armed conflict to be held on 31 October 2017

Throughout 2016, children continued to bear the brunt of armed conflict, as outlined in the report of the Secretary-General to be presented at the open debate; in several country situations, violations and abuses against children continued at high levels. According to the report, more than 8,000 children were killed and maimed in 2016, while more than 14,500 violations were verified. Notwithstanding the challenges to ending violations, there has been clear progress in protecting children, notably through dialogue and a redoubling of efforts to mitigate violations through conflict resolution and prevention. The Security Council's continuous action and engagement is indispensable in this regard.

As we commemorate the 10-year anniversary of the International Conference on Children involved in Armed Forces and Armed Groups: Free Children from War and of the adoption of the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups and the Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups (Paris Principles and Commitments), it is essential to reaffirm our collective commitment to protect children affected by armed conflict. In the follow-up to the conference on the theme "Protecting children from war", held in Paris on 21 February 2017, it is key to preserve all the tools and mechanisms adopted by the Security Council and to strengthen our action to address violations committed against children. Overall, it will allow discussion of solutions that respect the best interest of the child. In the context of the current fight against terrorism, the open debate will also focus on violations committed by non-State armed groups, including violent extremist groups and those that commit acts of terrorism.

We need to reiterate our support for a collective and comprehensive response and to again urge all parties to armed conflict to take all measures necessary to ensure that international law pertaining to the protection of children in armed conflicts is respected.

Following-up on the Paris Principles and Commitments

The open debate could notably offer the opportunity for Member States who have not yet done so to announce their endorsement of the Paris Principles and Commitments.

Also, more than ever, the outcomes and the tools adopted by the Security Council are indispensable. The open debate will, therefore, also offer an opportunity to reflect on how they can be enhanced and to support the Secretary-General and his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict in reinforcing those tools and making them as operational as possible.

Preventing recruitment and use of children by non-State armed groups and fighting indoctrination of children on the path to violent extremism

As recalled in the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (A/72/361-S/2017/821), the ever-changing and complex nature of certain conflicts also poses challenges for the protection of children. Among them is how to

address the severe impact on children caused by asymmetric attacks by non-State armed groups, including by violent extremist and terrorist groups. In 2016, non-State armed groups continued to have a severe impact on children in more than 10 countries. A range of them were responsible for more than 11,500 of the verified violations highlighted in the Secretary-General's report. Violent extremist groups were responsible for more than 6,800 violations. Children affected by violent extremism were often the direct targets of acts intended to cause maximum civilian casualties and terrorize communities. In this context, the recruitment and use of children is more than ever a prevalent concern.

In continuity with the open debate held in March 2015 under the presidency of France, the open debate will therefore aim at stressing the challenges posed by non-State armed groups, including terrorist groups, to the protection of children in armed conflict situations, bearing in mind that the existing tools remain fully appropriate and efficient, including in this context.

The situations in which children are victims of non-State armed groups have been of increasing concern, given that non-State armed groups that commit acts of terrorism have:

(a) Targeted children and youth through social media to recruit them, sometimes even in early childhood;

(b) Used children in attacks against civilians, including as human bombs and human shields;

(c) Committed large-scale violations and abuse against children when committing acts of terrorism;

(d) Sexually abused and exploited girls through organized sexual slavery, child, early and forced marriages, and human trafficking.

It is absolutely necessary for the Member States and other actors to respond to that evolving type of recruitment and use of children and to respond to what represents a major threat on many levels.

In this context, it is also key to recall the principles of distinction and proportionality and to implement specific safeguards to protect children from violations, including when engaging in counter-terrorism operations. All efforts to counter terrorism must, of course, be carried out in compliance with international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law.

Participants

Briefers:

- The Secretary-General

  Virginia **Gamba de Potgieter**, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

- Mubin **Shaikh**, Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative

All the participants are invited to keep their interventions as short and focused as possible, preferably around four minutes.

Outcome

The adoption by the Security Council of a presidential statement is sought.

Way forward

During the debate, all Member States are invited to make short interventions, no longer than four minutes, on the concrete actions undertaken, including national laws, action plans signed with the United Nations, the development of commitments and guidelines, to prevent the recruitment and use of children by non-State armed groups and to improve the protection of children in armed conflict situations.

The representatives of countries that have not yet done so are invited to announce whether they will endorse the Paris Principles and Commitments.

Indicative questions for operational improvements

- **Elaboration of action plans and endorsement of the Paris Principles and Commitments.** Can your country, if it has not yet done so, endorse the Paris Principles and Commitments?
- **What could be done to strengthen regional cooperation?**
- **What lessons have been learned from the different experiences? What obstacles to better protection have been identified?**
- **Exchange of good practices and elaboration of guidelines with respect to addressing child recruitment by non-State armed groups, including violent extremist groups and those that commit acts of terrorism.** How can we best exchange best practices in order to reinforce the prevention of violence and recruitment or use of children by non-State armed groups, including those that commit acts of terrorism? How can we elaborate a common approach to better understand the new recruitment strategies? How can we better address the prevention of indoctrination on the Internet? What early warning systems can be elaborated? What awareness raising methods have proved to be efficient?
- **Addressing the root causes of recruitment and use of children through reinforced educational programs.** How can we better integrate the specific needs of children in armed conflict situations in the work done to ensure access to education, in line with the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 16?
- **How can child protection capacity be reinforced?**
- **How can we enhance cooperation within the Security Council to tackle issues related to children and armed conflict, including through discussions between the Working Group and the committees?**
- **A more regular focus on the children and armed conflict agenda of the Security Council.** How can more regular briefings by the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict on country-specific situations be set? How can Special Representatives involved in mediation and peace processes regarding conflicts that are on the agenda of the Security Council better take into consideration child protection concerns? How can child protection concerns be better integrated into cessation of hostilities and peace agreements?
- **Cooperation with regional organizations.** How can cooperation between the United Nations, regional and subregional organizations and Member States be enhanced? How can common regional frameworks and guidelines be further elaborated?

- **Military interventions and peacekeeping operations.** How can military interventions by national forces or peace operations under Security Council mandates better integrate child protection and the prevention of recruitment and use of children into their operational plans? How best to develop strategies and exchange best practices to avoid violations, prevent recruitment and use and separate children from non-State armed groups?

- **Improving the response to the needs and the particular vulnerability of girls.** How can we better improve the way those specific needs are taken into consideration in our collective response to violence against children? How can we better fight against the use of rape and other forms of sexual violence, including sexual slavery, by non-State armed groups, including those that commit acts of terrorism? How can we address the issue of stigmatization? How can we improve the monitoring and reporting mechanism on this specific issue?

- **Tackling the issues of internally displaced, missing and unaccompanied children and refugees.** Given that many children, including girls, are fleeing as a result of violations perpetrated by non-State armed groups, including those that commit acts of terrorism, what could be done to prevent risks of violence and abuses, to address all impacts on displaced children and to ensure access to basic needs and services, including education, psychosocial support and rehabilitation? How can we efficiently collect and process information about missing children? How can we better address the issue of unaccompanied children?

- **How can we best address the issues of detention and reintegration of children?** How can we better address the issue of de-indoctrination and reintegration of children associated with violent extremist non-State armed groups and groups that commit acts of terrorism?

- **More accountability for perpetrators and the fight against impunity.** How can we ensure that perpetrators are systematically brought to justice? How can we better use sanctions to exert pressure on perpetrators? How can Member States strengthen their support for justice systems in this regard?